



## SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

[Release No. 34-93111; File No. SR-NASDAQ-2021-072]

### **Self-Regulatory Organizations; The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC; Notice of Filing and Immediate Effectiveness of Proposed Rule Change to Amend Equity 7, Section 118 of the Fee Schedule**

September 23, 2021.

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(1) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 (“Act”)<sup>1</sup>, and Rule 19b-4 thereunder,<sup>2</sup> notice is hereby given that on September 14, 2021, The Nasdaq Stock Market LLC (“Nasdaq” or “Exchange”) filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC” or “Commission”) the proposed rule change as described in Items I, II, and III, below, which Items have been prepared by the Exchange. The Commission is publishing this notice to solicit comments on the proposed rule change from interested persons.

I. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Terms of Substance of the Proposed Rule Change

The Exchange proposes to amend the Exchange’s pricing schedule at Equity 7, Section 118(a), as described further below.

The text of the proposed rule change is available on the Exchange’s Website at <https://listingcenter.nasdaq.com/rulebook/nasdaq/rules>, at the principal office of the Exchange, and at the Commission’s Public Reference Room.

II. Self-Regulatory Organization’s Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

In its filing with the Commission, the Exchange included statements concerning the purpose of and basis for the proposed rule change and discussed any comments it received on the proposed rule change. The text of these statements may be examined at the places specified in

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<sup>1</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(1).

<sup>2</sup> 17 CFR 240.19b-4.

Item IV below. The Exchange has prepared summaries, set forth in sections A, B, and C below, of the most significant aspects of such statements.

A. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement of the Purpose of, and Statutory Basis for, the Proposed Rule Change

1. Purpose

The purpose of the proposed rule change is to amend the Exchange's schedule of credits, at Equity 7, Section 118(a). Specifically, the Exchange proposes to eliminate an existing credit of \$0.0030 per share for members that meet specified volume requirements on both Nasdaq and the Nasdaq Options Market ("NOM") when adding liquidity and that qualify for Tier 4 of the MARS program on NOM.

The Exchange currently provides a \$0.0030 per share executed credit for a member with displayed quotes/orders (other than Supplemental Orders or Designated Retail Orders) that provide more than 0.65% of Consolidated Volume on Nasdaq during the month, and the member must also qualify for Tier 4 of NOM's MARS program during the month. To qualify for the Tier 4 MARS program, a Participant must have an average daily volume ("ADV") of at least 20,000 Eligible Contracts in a month that are executed and that added liquidity.

The Exchange proposes to eliminate the credit on all tapes as it has not been effective in accomplishing its intended purpose, which is to incent members to increase their liquidity adding activity on both Nasdaq and NOM. Although the Exchange amended the credit in April 2021 to incentivize members to increase the extent of their liquidity providing activity on Nasdaq,<sup>3</sup> no members have received this credit since the Exchange last amended the credit and it has served to neither meaningfully increase activity on the Exchange or NOM nor improve the quality of those markets since April 2021. Moreover, no member currently qualifies for the credit. The Exchange therefore proposes to eliminate it.

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<sup>3</sup> Securities Exchange Act Release No. 91619 (April 21, 2021), 79 FR 22291, (April 27, 2021).

## 2. Statutory Basis

The Exchange believes that its proposal is consistent with Section 6(b) of the Act,<sup>4</sup> in general, and furthers the objectives of Sections 6(b)(4) and 6(b)(5) of the Act,<sup>5</sup> in particular, in that it provides for the equitable allocation of reasonable dues, fees and other charges among members and issuers and other persons using any facility, and is not designed to permit unfair discrimination between customers, issuers, brokers, or dealers. The proposal is also consistent with Section 11A of the Act relating to the establishment of the national market system for securities.

### The Proposal is Reasonable

The Exchange's proposal is reasonable in several respects. As a threshold matter, the Exchange is subject to significant competitive forces in the market for equity securities transaction services that constrain its pricing determinations in that market. The fact that this market is competitive has long been recognized by the courts. In NetCoalition v. Securities and Exchange Commission, the D.C. Circuit stated as follows: “[n]o one disputes that competition for order flow is ‘fierce.’ ... As the SEC explained, ‘[i]n the U.S. national market system, buyers and sellers of securities, and the broker-dealers that act as their order-routing agents, have a wide range of choices of where to route orders for execution’; [and] ‘no exchange can afford to take its market share percentages for granted’ because ‘no exchange possesses a monopoly, regulatory or otherwise, in the execution of order flow from broker dealers’ ....”<sup>6</sup>

The Commission and the courts have repeatedly expressed their preference for competition over regulatory intervention in determining prices, products, and services in the securities markets. In Regulation NMS, while adopting a series of steps to improve the current

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<sup>4</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78f(b).

<sup>5</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78f(b)(4) and (5).

<sup>6</sup> NetCoalition v. SEC, 615 F.3d 525, 539 (D.C. Cir. 2010) (quoting Securities Exchange Act Release No. 59039 (December 2, 2008), 73 FR 74770, 74782-83 (December 9, 2008) (SR-NYSEArca-2006-21)).

market model, the Commission highlighted the importance of market forces in determining prices and SRO revenues and, also, recognized that current regulation of the market system “has been remarkably successful in promoting market competition in its broader forms that are most important to investors and listed companies.”<sup>7</sup>

Numerous indicia demonstrate the competitive nature of this market. For example, clear substitutes to the Exchange exist in the market for equity security transaction services. The Exchange is only one of several equity venues to which market participants may direct their order flow. Competing equity exchanges offer similar tiered pricing structures to that of the Exchange, including schedules of rebates and fees that apply based upon members achieving certain volume thresholds.

Within this environment, market participants can freely and often do shift their order flow among the Exchange and competing venues in response to changes in their respective pricing schedules. Within the foregoing context, the proposal represents a reasonable attempt by the Exchange to update its fee schedule when certain credits are ineffective in increasing its liquidity and market share relative to its competitors.

The Exchange believes that it is reasonable to eliminate its existing \$0.0030 per share executed credit for a member (1) with shares of liquidity provided in all securities through one or more of its Nasdaq Market Center MPIDs that represent more than 0.65% of Consolidated Volume during the month and (2) that qualifies for Tier 4 of the MARS program on The Nasdaq Options Market during the month. As discussed above, the Exchange has observed that historically no members have received this credit, and no member currently qualifies for it. The credit has served to neither meaningfully increase activity on the Exchange or NOM nor improve the quality of those markets. Under these circumstances, the Exchange believes it is reasonable to eliminate the credit and reallocate its limited resources to more effective incentive programs.

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<sup>7</sup> Securities Exchange Act Release No. 51808 (June 9, 2005), 70 FR 37496, 37499 (June 29, 2005) (“Regulation NMS Adopting Release”).

The Exchange notes that those market participants that are dissatisfied with the proposal is free to shift their order flow to competing venues that offer more generous pricing or less stringent qualifying criteria.

#### The Proposal is an Equitable Allocation of Credits

The Exchange believes its proposal will allocate its charges and credits fairly among its market participants.

The Exchange believes that is an equitable allocation to eliminate its existing \$0.0030 per share executed credit for a member (1) with shares of liquidity provided in all securities through one or more of its Nasdaq Market Center MPIDs that represent more than 0.65% of Consolidated Volume during the month and (2) that qualifies for Tier 4 of the MARS program on The Nasdaq Options Market during the month. As discussed above, the Exchange has observed that historically, no member has received this credit since the Exchange amended the credit in April 2021, and no member currently qualifies for it. The credit has served to neither meaningfully increase activity on the Exchange or NOM nor improve the quality of those markets. Under these circumstances, the Exchange believes it is equitable to eliminate the credit and reallocate its limited resources to more effective incentive programs.

Any participant that is dissatisfied with the proposal is free to shift their order flow to competing venues that provide more generous pricing or less stringent qualifying criteria.

#### The Proposal is not Unfairly Discriminatory

The Exchange believes that its proposal is not unfairly discriminatory. As an initial matter, the Exchange believes that nothing about its volume-based tiered pricing model is inherently unfair; instead, it is a rational pricing model that is well-established and ubiquitous in today's economy among firms in various industries – from co-branded credit cards to grocery stores to cellular telephone data plans – that use it to reward the loyalty of their best customers that provide high levels of business activity and incent other customers to increase the extent of their business activity. It is also a pricing model that the Exchange and its competitors have long

employed with the assent of the Commission. It is fair because it enhances price discovery and improves the overall quality of the equity markets.

The proposal to eliminate one of the Exchange's transaction credits is not unfairly discriminatory because no members have received this credit since March 2021 and currently, no member qualifies for the credit, such that its elimination is fair and will have limited impact. The Exchange has limited resources with which to apply to incentives, and it must allocate those limited resources in a manner that prioritizes areas of greatest need and potential effect.

Any participant that is dissatisfied with the proposal is free to shift their order flow to competing venues that provide more generous pricing or less stringent qualifying criteria.

#### B. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Burden on Competition

The Exchange does not believe that the proposed rule change will impose any burden on competition not necessary or appropriate in furtherance of the purposes of the Act.

##### Intramarket Competition

The Exchange does not believe that its proposal will place any category of Exchange participant at a competitive disadvantage.

The proposed elimination of one of the Exchange's existing transaction credits will have minimal competitive effect insofar as the credit has not been utilized by any member since March 2021. The Exchange notes that it offers other means to attain similar credit tiers.

The Exchange notes that its members are free to trade on other venues to the extent they believe that the remaining credits are not attractive. As one can observe by looking at any market share chart, price competition between exchanges is fierce, with liquidity and market share moving freely between exchanges in reaction to fee and credit changes.

##### Intermarket Competition

In terms of inter-market competition, the Exchange notes that it operates in a highly competitive market in which market participants can readily favor competing venues if they deem fee levels at a particular venue to be excessive, or rebate opportunities available at other

venues to be more favorable. In such an environment, the Exchange must continually adjust its credits and fees to remain competitive with other exchanges and with alternative trading systems that have been exempted from compliance with the statutory standards applicable to exchanges. Because competitors are free to modify their own credits and fees in response, and because market participants may readily adjust their order routing practices, the Exchange believes that the degree to which credit or fee changes in this market may impose any burden on competition is extremely limited.

The proposed eliminated credit is reflective of this competition because, even as one of the largest U.S. equities exchanges by volume, the Exchange has less than 20% market share, which in most markets could hardly be categorized as having enough market power to burden competition. Moreover, as noted above, price competition between exchanges is fierce, with liquidity and market share moving freely between exchanges in reaction to fee and credit changes. This is in addition to free flow of order flow to and among off-exchange venues which comprises upwards of 50% of industry volume.

In sum, if the change proposed herein is unattractive to market participants, it is likely that the Exchange will lose market share as a result. Accordingly, the Exchange does not believe that the proposed change will impair the ability of members or competing order execution venues to maintain their competitive standing in the financial markets.

C. Self-Regulatory Organization's Statement on Comments on the Proposed Rule Change Received from Members, Participants, or Others

No written comments were either solicited or received.

III. Date of Effectiveness of the Proposed Rule Change and Timing for Commission Action

Pursuant to Section 19(b)(3)(A)(ii) of the Act,<sup>8</sup> the Exchange has designated this proposal as establishing or changing a due, fee, or other charge imposed by the self-regulatory

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<sup>8</sup> 15 U.S.C. 78s(b)(3)(A)(ii).

organization on any person, whether or not the person is a member of the self-regulatory organization, which renders the proposed rule change effective upon filing.

At any time within 60 days of the filing of the proposed rule change, the Commission summarily may temporarily suspend such rule change if it appears to the Commission that such action is: (i) necessary or appropriate in the public interest; (ii) for the protection of investors; or (iii) otherwise in furtherance of the purposes of the Act. If the Commission takes such action, the Commission shall institute proceedings to determine whether the proposed rule should be approved or disapproved.

#### IV. Solicitation of Comments

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments concerning the foregoing, including whether the proposed rule change is consistent with the Act. Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

##### Electronic comments:

- Use the Commission's Internet comment form (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>); or
- Send an e-mail to [rule-comments@sec.gov](mailto:rule-comments@sec.gov). Please include File Number SR-NASDAQ-2021-072 on the subject line.

##### Paper comments:

- Send paper comments in triplicate to Secretary, Securities and Exchange Commission, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549-1090.

All submissions should refer to File Number SR-NASDAQ-2021-072. This file number should be included on the subject line if e-mail is used. To help the Commission process and review your comments more efficiently, please use only one method. The Commission will post all comments on the Commission's Internet website (<http://www.sec.gov/rules/sro.shtml>). Copies of the submission, all subsequent amendments, all written statements with respect to the proposed rule change that are filed with the Commission, and all written communications relating to the proposed rule change between the Commission and any person, other than those



that may be withheld from the public in accordance with the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552, will be available for website viewing and printing in the Commission's Public Reference Room, 100 F Street, NE, Washington, DC 20549, on official business days between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Copies of the filing also will be available for inspection and copying at the principal office of the Exchange. All comments received will be posted without change. Persons submitting comments are cautioned that we do not redact or edit personal identifying information from comment submissions. You should submit only information that you wish to make available publicly. All submissions should refer to File Number SR-NASDAQ-2021-072 and should be submitted on or before **[INSERT DATE 21 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]**.

For the Commission, by the Division of Trading and Markets, pursuant to delegated authority.<sup>9</sup>

**J. Matthew DeLesDernier,**

*Assistant Secretary.*

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<sup>9</sup> 17 CFR 200.30-3(a)(12).